



Suffolk to Consider Drugs From Canada

By Dawn Wotapka
STAFF WRITER

November 26, 2003

Suffolk County could become the next municipality to rebel against skyrocketing prescription drug costs by turning to Canada.



Yesterday, Rep. Steve Israel and County Executive-elect Steve Levy announced a joint feasibility study to determine whether importing Suffolk employees' medicines would be safe and cost effective.

The move copies that of Springfield, Mass., which pioneered the controversial idea in July and has shaved more than \$600,000 from drug bills. Other municipalities considering similar plans include New York City, Sacramento and Burlington, Vt.

"It's time for us to get on board," Levy said at the sparsely attended announcement. " ... Unless the federal government comes forward and puts the kibosh on this innovative program, we'll hopefully save some money."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has said all drug importation is illegal because of safety concerns. A spokesman yesterday chastised elected officials considering "unsafe behavior."

"You have to ask if they're willing to trade safety for savings," said Peter Pitts, the FDA's associate commissioner for external relations. "You have to ask them whether they're willing to break the law."

Israel urged the FDA to stop "scaring people." He said the local commission's data, which should take between four and six months to compile, could prove the process is safe and economically sound. If it does, the information will be rushed to Health and Human Services, urging for the change.

In the past year, the cost of filling drugs for Suffolk's 11,000 employees jumped 22 percent. This year, drug costs will be about \$38 million, Levy said.

Copyright © 2003, [Newsday, Inc.](#)